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23 March 1963

Dear Senator Stennis:

DC  
In response to your telephone request on March 15th and the confirming letter from Mr. Kendall of the same date, I am forwarding the appended report on Cuba. As subsequently arranged, the response to the last topic listed in Mr. Kendall's letter has been omitted.

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This appraisal, approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, supplements the detailed information provided to the Preparedness Subcommittee by the Director, DIA, and the Chiefs of Army, Navy, and Air Force Intelligence. It is based on information available to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on March 23, 1963. The evaluations and estimates of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the current military situation in Cuba have a direct relationship to existing US military contingency plans. Accordingly, I am sure you will appreciate that the content of the report is highly sensitive information.

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I trust the appended report is responsive to the needs of the Preparedness Subcommittee.

Sincerely,

(SgJ) MAXWELL D. TAYLOR

1 Incl  
Report

MAXWELL D. TAYLOR  
Chairman  
Joint Chiefs of Staff

The Honorable John Stennis  
United States Senate  
Chairman  
Preparedness Investigating  
Subcommittee

CONFIDENTIAL

## APPRAISAL OF CUBAN AND SOVIET MILITARY STRENGTH IN CUBA

### INTRODUCTION

DC  
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Since the missile/bomber crisis of October 1962 and the subsequent withdrawal of Soviet strategic weapons and associated personnel, the military posture in Cuba remains essentially and significantly improved. Cuban military establishment lacked by Soviet air and ground units, highlighted by air and coast defense system, particularly an integrated island-wide air defense network of high-performance aircraft and surface-to-air-missiles.

### SOVIET MILITARY STRENGTH IN CUBA

DC  
Since 13 February, substantial numbers of passengers have departed Cuba en route to the USSR. Reliable reports indicate that probably a total of about 3,000 have been withdrawn, the great majority appearing to be military. On the other hand, it is entirely possible that some of the many Soviet ships that have arrived in Cuba since 13 February have carried military reinforcements. Evidence presently on hand thus still does not permit a firm conclusion as to the actual numbers of Soviet military personnel that remain. In view of the foregoing and coupled with the fact that no basic changes have been observed in the Soviet military establishments in Cuba, we have not yet revised the estimate of Soviet military strength as being in the magnitude of 17,500.

DC  
We have no indications that Soviet personnel and equipment are being withdrawn from the four Soviet military camps at Holguin, Remedios, Artemisia, and Santiago de las Vegas. About 5,000 Soviet troops have been estimated to be in four highly mobile armored groupings at these camps, well equipped with modern, sophisticated weapons, and about 5,000 involved in the 24-site SA-2 missile system. The remainder are manning the other Soviet-controlled installations and equipment or are attached to Cuban ground, air, and naval units as advisors and instructors. There are also military personnel from other Bloc countries, principally Czechoslovakians, probably amounting not more than a few hundred. Based on all available evidence, we believe basic Soviet capabilities in Cuba have not been diminished since the withdrawal of the strategic weapons, and our estimate of Soviet troop strength in Cuba remains essentially unchanged.

Retention of sophisticated weapons systems under Soviet control - such as the MIG-21 aircraft, SA-2's, coastal defense cruise missiles, and the KOMAR guided-missile boats - may eventually raise in some quarters of Cuban society and some Cuban resentment of the Soviet role in Cuba. Castro, on occasion, has already indicated his opposition to the Soviet failure to challenge continued US overflights. The presence of Soviet combat groupings may also strain Soviet-Cuban relations because of their ability to intervene in Cuban affairs.

Castro's internal security apparatus is in itself highly effective and, to date, has proved quite capable of suppressing the sporadic anti-government actions attempted thus far in Cuba.

#### CUBAN MILITARY STRENGTH AND CAPABILITIES

The numerical strength of the Cuban ground forces is about 175,000 - approximately 75,000 in the standing army and 100,000 in the ready reserve. In addition, there are some 100,000 home-guard militiamen of insignificant combat capability but useful as a police reserve. The standing ground forces have substantially completed basic and combined arms training at battalion combat team level.

The capabilities of the standing army and ready reserve have been enhanced by new equipment brought in during 1962 and by further training and experience, particularly in the situation during the crisis. The Cuban ground forces are fully able to control internal resistance and to repel small-scale invasions from abroad. Their ability to defend against a large-scale US military invasion would be limited by their lack of training and experience and joint operations on the division level. In such a

contingency, they would have to report fairly quickly to tactical defense or guerrilla operations, but only a relatively small proportion of the Cuban military establishment would be able or likely to carry out prolonged operations of this type.

The most significant change in the Cuban military situation since July 1962, other than the introduction and removal of Soviet strategic weapons, is the improvement in air defense capabilities resulting from the presence of the Soviet-manned radar and communications networks, SA-2 missile sites, and 42 MIG-21 fighters. The strong Soviet air defense presence -- supplemented by the Cuban-manned jet fighter force composed of about 65 MIG-15/17/19's and a considerable quantity of Cuban anti-aircraft artillery -- now gives Cuba an integrated air defense system. Although Cubans may be trained eventually to operate the more advanced Soviet air defense equipment, there are now some indications that such training is promptly taking place. However, for some time Soviet manning will be required for effective use of the equipment.

Considerable improvement has occurred within the past year in Castro's capabilities to combat guerrilla elements within his own country. Castro now has a "vertical envelopment" capability involving the use of land-based helicopters and paratroopers, thus severely restricting the ability of anti-Castro guerrilla elements to carry out sustained operations in significant strength. Furthermore, MIG fighter aircraft provide an island-wide capability for applying air attacks against guerrilla actions.

Cuban capabilities for military operations overseas remain severely limited by the lack of the requisite air or sea lift. The Cubans probably could only undertake an overseas operation in limited strength of somewhat less than a battalion. However, for political as well as military reasons, the Castro regime is most unlikely, under present circumstances, to undertake military operations of this nature.

DC  
An actual threat to US security would be posed by the possibility of Soviet use of Cuban ports for logistic support of their submarines. Although we cannot rule out Soviet intentions, we have no evidence that the Soviets are establishing a submarine base in Cuba, and every report concerning this contingency is pursued thoroughly.

DC  
Based on the conclusion that, with the 1962 withdrawal of missiles and bombers, no such systems are presently in Cuba, we do not believe a nuclear threat from Cuba currently exists. Although the Cubans almost certainly have some caves for storage of supplies, ammunition and equipment, extensive intelligence collection and analysis has failed to provide any evidence to substantiate numerous and persistent rumors and reports that ballistic missiles are hidden in caves and secret installations in Cuba. Furthermore, comprehensive evaluation of all available information has produced no evidence of the presence of nuclear weapons in Cuba. Storage facilities at the missile sites were either never completed or have been abandoned. In addition, there is also no evidence of the elaborate security precautions which the Soviets customarily take with respect to such weapons.

DC  
In general, we believe that situations are unlikely to develop in which Castro would openly intervene in the Western Hemisphere with substantial forces in the face of prompt and vigorous US military and counter-action. Castro probably prefers to continue his extensive propaganda campaign and to concentrate on rendering clandestine support to insurgency in other Latin American countries, with particular emphasis on guerrilla training and ideological indoctrination of revolutionary leaders invited to Cuba and sent back to lead anti-government activities in their homelands.

DC  
In conclusion, while current Soviet/Cuban military capabilities do not constitute a direct threat to the United States, continued Soviet military support and presence will not only strengthen Communist Cuba as an active, relatively secure base for subversion and as a potential military operational base.

## US DEPLOYMENTS IN RESPONSE TO THE CUBAN/ SOVIET THREAT

As has been previously discussed, the continued presence of Soviet military units in Cuba do not, per se, pose an immediate threat to the United States, nor will their departure in the future have any significant impact on our deployments to provide for the security of the Southeastern United States. What is of significance is the continued presence of Soviet troops in this hemisphere and of weapons systems that could conceivably be employed in a hit-and-run attack against the United States, our aircraft or our shipping. The recent "Shrimp Boat" incident lends credence to such a potential. On balance, however, it is difficult to envision circumstances in which either the Castro regime or the Soviet authorities would find such a course of action to their advantage. Nevertheless, the defenses of the Southeastern United States have been significantly strengthened. Two Hawk battalions, one T-16 battalion, and increased numbers of fighter aircraft have been deployed to Southern Florida to cope with such an eventuality. However, the bulk of US forces deployed during the October crisis have returned to their normal stations. Our continuing analysis reveals that present commitment of forces planned for Cuban contingencies is appropriate, regardless of whether Soviet units remain or depart Cuba.

**TRANSCRIBED PAGES FOLLOW**

THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

23 March 1963

Dear Senator Stennis:

In response to your telephone request of March 15th and the confirming letter from Mr. Kendall of the same date, I am forwarding the appended report on Cuba. As subsequently arranged, the response to the last topic listed in Mr. Kendall's letter has been omitted.

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I trust the appended report is responsive to the needs of the Preparedness Subcommittee.

Sincerely,

Maxwell D. Taylor



# APPRAISAL OF CUBAN AND SOVIET MILITARY STRENGTH IN CUBA

## INTRODUCTION

Since the missile/bomber crisis of October 1962 and the subsequent withdrawal of Soviet strategic weapons and associated personnel, the military posture in Cuba remains essentially a significantly improved Cuban military establishment backed by Soviet air and ground units, highlighted by air and coast defense systems, particularly an integrated island-wide defense network of high-performance aircraft and surface-to-air missiles.

## SOVIET MILITARY MILITARY STRENGTH IN CUBA

Since 13 February, substantial numbers of passengers have departed Cuba en route to the USSR. Reliable reports indicate that probably a total of about 3,000 have been withdrawn, the great majority appearing to be military. On the other hand, it is entirely possible that some of the many Soviet ships that have arrived in Cuba since 13 February have carried military replacements. Evidence presently on hand still does not permit a firm conclusion as to the actual numbers of Soviet military personnel that remain. In view of the foregoing and coupled with the fact that basic changes have been observed in the Soviet military establishments in Cuba, we have not yet revised the estimate of Soviet military strength as being in the magnitude of 17,500.

We have no indications that Soviet personnel and equipment are being withdrawn from the four Soviet military camps at Holguin, Remedios, Artemisia, and Santiago de las Vegas. About 5,000 Soviet troops have been estimated to be in four highly mobile armored grouping at these camps, well equipped with modern, sophisticated weapons, and about 5,000 involved in their 24-site SA-2 missile systems. The remainder are manning the other Soviet-controlled installations and equipment or are attached to Cuban ground, air, and naval units as advisors and instructors. There are also military personnel from other Bloc countries, principally Czechoslovakians, probably entailing not more than a few hundred. Based on all available evidence, we believe basic Soviet capabilities in Cuba have not been diminished since the withdrawal of the strategic weapons, and our estimate of Soviet troop strength in Cuba remains essentially unchanged.

Retention of sophisticated weapons systems under Soviet control such as the MiG-21 aircraft, SA-2's coastal defense cruise missiles, and the KOMAR guided missile boats - may eventually raise irksome questions of Cuban sovereignty and some Cuban resentment of the Soviet role in Cuba. Castro, on occasion, has already indicated his opposition to the Soviet failure to [ ? ] US overflights. The presence of Soviet combat groupings may also strain Soviet-Cuban relations because of their ability to intervene in Cuban affairs.

Castro's internal security apparatus is in itself highly effective and, to date, has proved quite capable of suppressing the sporadic anti-government actions attempted thus far in Cuba.

### CUBAN MILITARY STRENGTH AND CAPABILITIES

The numerical strength of the Cuban ground forces about 175,000 - approximately 75,000 in the standing army and 100,000 in the ready reserve. In addition, there are some 100,000 home-guard militiamen of insignificant combat ability but useful as a police reserve. The standing ground forces have successfully completed basic unit and combined arms training at battalion combat team level.

The capabilities of the standing army and ready reserve have been enhanced by new equipment brought in during 1962 and by further training and experience, [ illegible ] during the crisis. The Cuban ground force [ illegible ] able to control internal resistance and to repel small-scale actions from abroad. Their ability to defend against a large-scale US military invasion would be limited by their lack of training and experience and joint operations on the division level. In such a

contingency, they would have to revert fairly quickly to static defense of guerrilla operations, but only a relatively small proportion of the Cuban military establishment would be able or likely to carry out prolonged operations of this type.

The most significant change in the Cuban military situation since July 1962, other than the introduction and removal of Soviet strategic weapons, is the improvement in air defense capabilities resulting from the presence of the Soviet-manned radar and communications networks, SA-2 missiles sites and 42 MiG-21 fighters. The strong Soviet air defense presence - supplemented by the Cuban-manned jet fighter force composed of about 65 MiG-15/17/19's and a considerable quantity of Cuban anti-aircraft artillery - now gives Cuba an integrated air defense system. Although Cubans may be trained eventually to operate the more advanced Soviet air defense equipment, there are now some indications that such training is presently taking place. However, for some time Soviet manning will be required for effective use of the equipment.

Considerable improvement has occurred within the past year in Castro's capability to combat guerrilla elements within his own country. Castro now has a "vertical envelopment" capability involving the use of land-based helicopters and paratroopers, thus severely restricting the ability of anti-Castro guerrilla elements to carry out sustained operations to significant strength. Furthermore, MiG fighter aircraft provide an island-wide capability for applying air attacks against guerrilla actions.

Cuba capabilities for military operations overseas remain severely limited by the lack of the requisite air or sea lift. The Cubans probably could only undertake an overseas operation in limited strength of somewhat less than a battalion. However, for political as well as military reasons, the Castro regime is most unlikely, under present circumstances, to undertake military operations of this nature.

An added threat to US security would be posed by the possibility of Soviet use of Cuban ports for logistic support of their submarines. Although we cannot [ ? ] Soviet intentions, we have no evidence that the Soviets are establishing a submarine base in Cuba, and every report concerning this contingency is pursued thoroughly.

Based on the conclusion that, with the 1962 withdrawal of missiles and bombers, no such systems are presently in Cuba, we do not believe a nuclear threat from Cuba currently exists. Although the Cubans most certainly has some caves for storage of supplies, ammunition and equipment intensive intelligence collection and analysis has failed to provide any evidence to substantiate numerous and persistent rumors and reports that ballistic missiles are hidden in caves and secret installations in Cuba. Furthermore, comprehensive evaluation of all available information has produced no evidence of the presence of nuclear weapons in Cuba. Storage facilities at the missile sites were either never completed or have been abandoned. In addition, there is also no evidence of the elaborate security precautions which the Soviets customarily take with respect to such weapons.

In general, we believe that situations are unlikely to develop in which Castro would openly intervene in the Western Hemisphere with substantial forces in the face of prompt and vigorous US [ ? ] counter-action. Castro probably prefers to continue his extensive propaganda campaign and to concentrate on rendering clandestine support to insurgency in other Latin American countries; with particular emphasis on guerrilla training and ideological indoctrination of revolutionary leaders invited to Cuba and sent back to lead anti-government activities in their homelands.

In conclusion, while current Soviet/Cuban military capabilities do not constitute a direct threat to the United States, continued Soviet military support and presence will progressively strengthen Communist Cuba as an active, relatively secure base for subversion and a potential military operational base.

## US DEPLOYMENTS IN RESPONSE TO THE CUBAN/SOVIET THREAT

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**DRAFT FOLLOWS**

~~TOP SECRET~~

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Chairman  
Joint Chiefs of Staff

The Honorable John Stennis  
United States Senate  
Chairman  
Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee

~~TOP SECRET~~

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GROUP 1  
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